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Chairman: Mr. Acharya ..... (Nepal)

Contents

Agenda item 34: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 34: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/61/21, A/61/21/Add.1 and A/61/216)

1. **Mr. Baaziz** (Algeria) said that the Department of Public Information (DPI) had made a significant contribution to the work of the United Nations in promoting peace, security and development and had helped establish a positive image of the Organization. However, it should not lose sight of the fact that the digital divide represented a significant obstacle to development for the developing countries. It was clear that a global strategy was required to establish equality in the area of information. The Organization should continue to work towards ensuring that all States had equal access to information and communications technologies (ICTs). The number of visitors to the United Nations website was a clear indication of the public's interest in the activities of the Organization. Multilingualism remained one of the main concerns of delegations and it was important to ensure that all six official languages received equal treatment.

2. It was significant that the Organization had increased its capacities in the area of radio broadcasting because radio remained the most effective communications tool in developing countries. Since the United Nations had a major role to play in promoting the principle of freedom of the press, additional funds should be allocated so that journalists from developing countries could join the Journalists' Fellowship Programme.

3. Finally, he said that, for developing countries whose ICT capacities were modest, the United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) were a valuable source of information, communication and documentation. It was therefore important to maintain the funding and staffing levels of those centres.

4. **Mr. Elsherbini** (Egypt) said that the United Nations had continued to make progress in promoting international cooperation in the field of media and information and that DPI had played an important role in disseminating information on the activities of the Organization. It was important to acknowledge the importance of multilingualism and to ensure that all six official languages were given equal treatment, with a view to promoting dialogue and understanding among different civilizations and cultures.

5. He emphasized the importance of further intensifying DPI activities in order to raise awareness — through objective reporting of the real situation — of the need for peace and stability in the Middle East region. Meetings such as the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East represented an opportunity to promote dialogue and communication between Arabs and Israelis and to provide a better environment for the resumption of negotiations aimed at restoring stability in the region.

6. The United Nations also had a fundamental role to play in promoting international awareness of issues such as sustainable development, poverty eradication, human rights, women's rights and the rights of the child and development in Africa. The information centres remained important sources of information in the developing countries and any rationalization of those centres should be carried out in consultation with the host countries and should take into account the presence of the United Nations in the various regions of the world. DPI should continue to improve the information services of the Organization in order to strengthen cooperation and understanding between peoples and help developing countries achieve modernization.

7. **Mr. Al-Olaimi** (Kuwait) thanked the Under-Secretary-General for his report and commended DPI on the important role it was playing in helping to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries and on the policies and reforms it had adopted in the past few years.

8. He stressed the importance of such things as increasing cooperation between the United Nations and civil society; bridging the digital divide between the developed and developing countries; assuring the free and balanced flow of information; assuring equal treatment for all the official languages of the United Nations, including Arabic; focusing attention on and giving due importance to the question of Palestine; and full and timely payment by all States of their financial contributions to the Organization. He also cautioned against using the media to impose control or a particular ideology or to carry out campaigns that distorted or denigrated the religious beliefs of others, such as the one being carried out against Islam.

9. Kuwait had recently enacted a law that guaranteed the media more freedom and was committed to greater freedom for the media in a

manner that was consistent with the traditions of Kuwaiti society and its Arab and Islamic values.

10. **Ms. Kampa** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), expressed satisfaction with the various initiatives undertaken by DPI to restructure and revitalize its work and enhance communication between the United Nations and Member States, the media and civil society and welcomed, in particular, the efforts to reach out to the public and build effective partnerships with local, national and regional media. DPI had carried out an excellent campaign to promote the 2005 World Summit Outcome. The important role played by DPI in bridging the information gap between the Organization and the public and raising awareness of the Organization's role was reflected by the increase in the number of countries interested in joining the Committee on Information. Her Government appreciated the support it had received for its application to become a member of that Committee.

11. The ASEAN States would continue to provide support to the United Nations Information Service in Bangkok in disseminating information on the work of the Organization and publicizing and seeking support for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) among ASEAN member States. DPI's efforts to undertake a comprehensive review and reorientation of its work were to be commended because they would contribute to the overall reform process of the United Nations. There was no doubt that a more effective use of ICTs would help achieve the objective of system-wide coherence.

12. Drawing attention to the series of seminars entitled "Unlearning Intolerance" organized by DPI, she said that those seminars had been effective in promoting dialogue and enhancing understanding.

13. It was important to focus on the accessibility of information in terms of both form and substance and to ensure that messages reached people on the ground. Traditional media, such as radio and print, were still essential for disseminating messages at the grass-roots level. However, DPI should also step up its efforts to develop and enrich the content of its website in local languages in order to reach a wider audience.

14. Finally, she said that ASEAN welcomed DPI efforts to establish effective partnerships with NGOs, academics and civil society and it noted with satisfaction the use of the Internet in communicating to schools and students and called on DPI to continue to initiate similar creative programmes.

15. **Ms. Yan** Jiarong (China) said that the coordinated work of DPI had strengthened the capacities of the Organization in the area of public information. Her Government was particularly appreciative of the emphasis on the culture of evaluation and the application of the Annual Programme Impact Review. It believed that the next stage of the Organization's public information activities should focus on the implementation of the 2005 World Summit Outcome and on advancing the United Nations reforms. In the areas of economy and development, the progress of the reforms was lagging behind the expectations of numerous developing countries. DPI should publicize the progress and achievements of the Organization while at the same time directing more attention to issues relating to economy and development, with a view to giving impetus to the implementation of the MDGs.

16. The thematic public information campaign on the development of Africa should be intensified. One of the major challenges was to mobilize the international community to give more attention and support to the development of Africa. In that connection, DPI should consider putting forward a greater number of op-ed articles by the Secretary-General because they received widespread media attention.

17. It was important that DPI should play a bigger role in promoting understanding and dialogue among different civilizations, particularly in view of recent incidents such as that involving depiction of the prophet Muhammad in cartoons. In that connection her Government supported the "Unlearning Intolerance" series of seminars.

18. Outreach activities should be stepped up with a view to increasing communications and exchanges with Member States, civil society and the general public. However, when commissioning NGOs to organize film festivals at the United Nations, DPI should provide guidance and monitoring to ensure that the content of those films was satisfactory to all Member States.

19. **Ms. Lee** May Lin (Singapore) commended DPI on its commitment to inform and educate communities worldwide about the United Nations, and the creativity it had displayed in harnessing new technologies to broaden its scope. Given the diversity of sources of information available, the United Nations had to work

hard to make its voice heard, while maintaining its credibility and relevance.

20. The Department should also explore new ways to engage stakeholders and ensure that the message of the United Nations was broadly conveyed. One way would be to enhance DPI cooperation with Member States and with international, regional and local media organizations. The media outreach and training programmes for representatives of the media from developing countries were a step in the right direction.

21. **Mr. Win** (Myanmar) commended the Department of Public Information for addressing the strategic priorities of the Organization by disseminating information accurately and impartially. He argued that Member States should receive first-hand information on the important events affecting the United Nations through official channels that included DPI. He praised the efforts made by DPI to expand its outreach services through the targeted delivery of public information, enhanced use of new information and communications technologies and increased partnership with civil society while integrating the concept of evaluation at all levels of its work.

22. He also referred to the role of DPI in promoting peace, dialogue and development through sports, its use of Internet broadcasting as a means of delivering major United Nations events in real time and its role in providing information and information technology.

23. The Department of Public Information had carried out subprogrammes such as news, library and outreach services, in addition to communications campaigns on various subjects such as human rights, democracy and migration. Accurate, impartial and comprehensive information from DPI had helped Member States in addressing those crucial issues.

24. His Government attached great importance to its cooperation with the United Nations. The national development plan was aimed at accelerating growth and achieving equitable and balanced development, and reducing the socio-economic development gap between rural and urban areas of the country, while addressing the major aspects of the Millennium Development Goals. His delegation therefore hoped that the United Nations Information Centre in Myanmar would disseminate information on the activities carried out locally and the significant progress achieved in reaching the Goals.

25. **Mr. Althour** (Yemen) said that conflicts around the world severely affected the ability of governments and peoples to confront the numerous challenges that faced humanity such as poverty, hunger, and deadly epidemics. Facing those challenges required increased awareness, a culture of peace and cooperation, dialogue among civilizations, as well as respect for and acceptance of others and their holy sites.

26. Yemen was satisfied with General Assembly resolution 60/109 A-B, which, inter alia, underscored the importance of the United Nations information centres, particularly in developing countries. It was important to revitalize the information centre in Sana'a and to appoint a new director for the centre so the people of that geostrategically vital part of the world would be more aware of the Organization's activities.

27. His delegation was concerned at the lack of equal treatment for Arabic in relation to the other official languages and called on DPI to increase the use of Arabic in all of the Organization's activities without exception. In conclusion, his delegation welcomed and supported the strategic reorientation that DPI had embarked upon and that aimed to build partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector in order to more effectively provide services to a wider audience.

28. **Mr. Bially** (Côte d'Ivoire) welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information in its various activities and drew particular attention to the communication strategy intended to raise awareness of the challenges facing the United Nations. Côte d'Ivoire fully supported efforts to ensure coherence in the information disseminated by DPI and the other bodies, and appreciated the simultaneous distribution of documents in the official languages of the United Nations.

29. He outlined what was needed in order to process and transmit information using high technology, pointing out that, since it was all very costly, developing countries were at a particular disadvantage when it came to communicating their views and values and thereby enhancing diversity in the sources of information. In order to bridge the digital divide, developing countries needed to develop their communications infrastructure and capacity, and to allow their media establishments to freely establish their own information and communication policy. If the international community believed that provision

targeted information, increased use of new information and communications technologies, and partnership with civil society would facilitate the realization of the MDGs then the capacity of the Department of Public Information should be strengthened in order to allow it to rationalize and optimize its activities.

30. However, all such efforts would be in vain unless developing countries enjoyed effective freedom of the press. His delegation was proud of the fact that in spite of the pervading political tension, journalists in Côte d'Ivoire did enjoy freedom of the press, thanks to the work of a national council that strictly protected the interests of journalists and their freedom of expression.

31. His delegation fully endorsed the concept of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order as an evolving process in the true service of mankind. He urged DPI to continue in its efforts to grant special attention to major issues of concern to the international community, such as United Nations reform, conflict prevention, self-determination of peoples, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, human rights and counter-terrorism.

32. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said the media could play a vital role in many areas, particularly in relation to publicizing information on sustainable development. In order to do so, however, it was necessary to ensure that the stunning advances that had been made in information technology were not used to widen the digital divide between developed and developing countries. In fact, the United Nations, particularly through DPI, could play an important role in bridging that divide.

33. Recalling General Assembly resolution 34/182, he said that if the international community wanted to establish a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order, based on the free exchange and dissemination of information, it should put an end to the disparity between developed and developing countries with regard to the international distribution of news.

34. The difficulty in getting news to the widest audience possible in developing countries emphasized the importance of the traditional media as an easily accessible source of information. It was important not to neglect the role those media and United Nations information centres could play in promoting the noble mission of the Organization and raising public awareness of its activities. Those centres should not be closed, replaced by regional centres, or merged with any United Nations field office without consulting the host countries.

35. He concluded by calling upon the Department to continue implementing the special information programme on the question of Palestine until a just solution was reached.

36. **Ms. Mujuma** (United Republic of Tanzania) joined previous speakers in praising the work of DPI as the public voice of the United Nations, and extended her delegation's appreciation to DPI for taking into account the views of member States on the need to maintain information centres wherever possible.

37. As the digital divide continued to widen, and the international community contemplated improvements in the field of information and communications technology, there was need to address the concerns and special needs of developing countries. Tanzania believed that traditional means of communication should continue to be used for transmitting the message of the United Nations in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries.

38. The strong relationship between DPI and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) was encouraging, and she welcomed the guidance projects for the public information components of peacekeeping missions.

39. The importance of capacity-building and the improvement of technology to disseminate information were crucial. Tanzania appreciated the Journalists' Fellowship Programme and hoped that further resources would be allocated for that programme, so that larger numbers of journalists could benefit from it each year, particularly in those parts of the world that were disadvantaged in terms of technology.

40. **Mr. Mana** (Cameroon) commended DPI for the positive image it presented of the United Nations. Cameroon especially appreciated the campaigns highlighting issues such as sustainable development, HIV/AIDS, the development of Africa, human rights, including the rights of women and children, and, most particularly in view of recent events, threats to global peace and security, the dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace and tolerance. Much of the violence of the kind seen in recent weeks could be blamed on misunderstandings, prejudice and lack of communication. The Department could play a major

mediation role by advocating understanding and tolerance among peoples of different religions, as it had done in its recent series of seminars against intolerance. The historic importance of the new Human Rights Council had also rightly been highlighted by the Department.

41. Since traditional media such as radio remained the main source of information in many developing countries, the Department should strengthen its partnerships with local, national and regional broadcasters and produce programmes in local languages, which might dispel misunderstandings.

42. The United Nations information centres had the task of educating and raising awareness about the imperative of peace, which had prompted the founding of the United Nations itself. The information centre in Yaoundé, Cameroon, for instance, had recently used the occasion of the World Cup games to organize Internet discussions among young people from all nations about the place of sport in the promotion of peace and dialogue, using low-cost technologies it had been able to purchase. Any rationalization of the centres should be conducted in close consultation with the host countries and the other States they served. In Central Africa, the regional approach that proposed establishing an information centre in Angola for Portuguese-speaking countries should not in any way jeopardize the existence of the information centre in Cameroon, which had continuing importance for the French-speaking countries in the region and, in fact, should be strengthened.

43. **Ms. Traore** (Burkina Faso), congratulating the Department on its thoroughgoing reform, observed that although information was particularly important for the developing countries, yet unfortunately it was being undermined by globalization. The latter had not opened up access to information and communications technologies, but had exacerbated inequalities between the industrialized nations and the developing nations. The vast majority of people in her own country had no access to the new technologies.

44. Under such conditions, the United Nations information centres were crucial in making the Organization known and spreading its messages to local populations; and they served as a documentation resource for students, teachers and other professionals. It would be beneficial to rationalize the information centres provided the process was carried out as initially conceived. In the developing countries, the information centres should be kept and strengthened, and any rationalization should take place on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the States concerned within each region. Moreover, any human and financial resources arising from the closing of centres in developed countries should be redeployed to those in the developing countries.

45. The information centre in Burkina Faso also served three other countries — Mali, Niger and Chad. All four countries shared the same concerns, namely, the struggle against poverty and desertification and the promotion of health, security and development. Her Government supported the centre by offering — free of charge — premises and television and radio time for United Nations broadcasts. It also firmly intended to act on the texts adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society.

46. **Mr. Chabi** (Morocco) observed that information and communication should be at the heart of United Nations activities and that a culture of information should pervade its work at all levels. DPI had restructured itself to meet the demands of modern communication and had succeeded in improving its Internet sites and laying the basis for genuine multilingualism.

47. Information was particularly important, in the context of globalization as a channel for rapprochement between peoples and nations. The Department must work to that end by putting before the world a clear and realistic image of the Organization and communicating its ideals and goals.

48. In restructuring the United Nations information centres, it was necessary to bear in mind the importance of such centres in developing countries, which were deficient in the resources and infrastructure needed for the new technologies. Africa, which had been bypassed by the digital revolution and comprised only 1 per cent of Internet users, was fruitful ground for information and communication activities. Existing information centres should not only be strengthened but given more resources in order to overcome the digital divide. The information centre in Rabat, Morocco, was doing invaluable work in partnership with civil society, academic circles and the media.

49. DPI had refined its methods of work, activities and products by taking a new strategic approach based on focused dissemination of information and greater

use of the new technologies. The ultimate success of that promising approach remained, of course, to be assessed. The Department had also raised awareness of issues through its thematic campaigns regarding the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the question of migration. The question of Palestine would be another appropriate topic.

50. All United Nations bodies should be supported in their efforts to achieve genuine parity in the use of the official languages. The culture of multilingualism that was the pride of the United Nations was all the more critical in that language could be made a channel of peace and a factor in the rapprochement of cultures and regions.

51. The cooperation between DPI and DPKO served the basic mission of the United Nations, the maintenance of international peace and security. The aim should be to provide objective and impartial coverage of conflicts and make the local inhabitants understand the purpose of the peacekeeping operations.

52. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) thanked all who had taken part in a very rich debate on the work of his Department, demonstrating their deep commitment to the ideals of the United Nations. He believed that the growing partnership between the Department and the Committee on Information had been a key element in redefining the Department's role in a complex and evolving global media environment, paving the way for its renewal.

53. The Department had taken note of the approbation expressed but also of criticisms and constructive suggestions. There was a clear recognition of how important it was for the United Nations story to be heard and understood by people all around the world. While the Department would be happy to undertake a number of the additional activities suggested, it would need additional resources in order to do so.

54. Like the United Nations itself, the Department had embarked on a five-year process of reform and surmounted great obstacles in the process. The United Nations must continually reinvent itself to meet the needs of the times and reflect and even guide the priorities of a world in full evolution. As the voice of the United Nations, the Department of Public Information had done the same, offering a model of change within the Organization. It looked forward to the future with confidence.

Adoption of draft resolutions and decisions

55. **The Chairman** drew attention to chapter IV of the report of the Committee on Information (A/61/21), containing draft resolution A on information in the service of humanity, draft resolution B on United Nations public information policies and activities, and a draft decision on an increase in the membership of the Committee on Information.

56. *Draft resolutions A and B and the draft decision in document A/61/21, chapter IV, were adopted by consensus.*

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.